

AN HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF DALIT REVOLUTION IN ODISHA.



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Abstract.

The untouchable problem was a 'reproach to Hinduism rather than hardship to 'untouchables'. The request of religious heads to help reform of Hinduism is a Gandhian touch not found in earlier reform literature and it was to indicate that this appeal was valid as the resolution was supported at the Congress session by the Sankaracharya of Sarada Peeth who claimed his own Guru had taught that the uplift of the Depressed classes was in accordance with sastras. One-seventh of the Indian population who were so-called 'untouchables' had come to be recognized as socially deprived but politically important "Depressed Classes". A Depressed Class conference, attended by 2,500 people met on 11 November in Bombay under the Chairmanship of Justice Sir Narayan Ganesh Chandavarkar (1855-1923), President of the Congress in 1890, General Secretary of the Indian National Social Conference and President of the Depressed Classes Mission Society. In the second conference of the Depressed Classes Mission Society, Bal Gangadhar Tilak said: "If a God were to tolerate untouchability, I would not recognize him as God at all." a major change in the approach towards untouchability, however, under Gandhiji the issues of untouchability was more religious than social. The elevation of the untouchable Bhangi caste sanitation work to respectability and the attempt to agree on a policy regarding their children's entry into nationalist schools. Gandhiji made his position clear. He said: "Those temples where you are excluded from, because of your low birth have no Gods in them and those who enter them forcibly have no godliness within them". It inspired the Congress workers to propagate Gandhiji's philosophy among the masses in the villages and it practically brought the caste Hindus and dalits closer, despite stray cases of protest from a few Sanatanis.

Dalit, depressed, classes, untouchables, Hinduism, temple, bhangi, justice, philosophy, sanatani

Dalit Revolution In Odisha.

The Indian National Congress deliberately avoided social issues from its birth in 1885 until 1917. Even its most reform-minded leadership agreed with Dadabhai Naroji's statement at the Second annual Congress Session in 1886 that Congress was a political body to represent to the rulers about political aspirations of the Indians and not to discuss social reforms. The situation in 1917 was very different, the Extremist and the Moderates had merged the year before, the Muslim League and Congress agreed to be on a common platform, the Congress met in the atmosphere of a British promise of eventual Self-Government. The need was for support and politicization of the masses and by 1917 one-seventh of the Indian population who were so-called 'untouchables' had come to be recognized as socially deprived but politically important "Depressed Classes". In Bombay conferences of Depressed Classes, they were called alternatively by Congress reformers and non-Brahmin reformers, bringing the issue of untouchability before Congress in 1917 in such a way that it could hardly be ignored. A Depressed Class conference, attended by 2,500 people met on 11 November in Bombay under the Chairmanship of Justice Sir Narayan Ganesh Chandavarkar (1855-1923), President of the Congress in 1890, General Secretary of the Indian National Social Conference and President of the Depressed Classes Mission Society. In the second conference of the Depressed Classes Mission Society, Bal Gangadhar Tilak said: "If a God were to tolerate untouchability, I would not recognize him as God at all."

The multiple effects of Gandhiji's visit were that it gave a fillip to the dormant provincial organization. It inspired the Congress workers to propagate Gandhiji's philosophy among the masses in the villages and it practically brought the caste Hindus and dalits closer, despite stray cases of protest from a few Sanatanis.

With the rise of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi to Congress leadership in 1919, social reform became a legitimate cause for Congress concern. Gandhiji's leadership introduced a major change in the approach towards untouchability, however, under Gandhiji the issues of untouchability was more religious than social. The resolutions of Congress in the 1920's, its subcommittees on untouchability and its efforts to deal with the work of the untouchable castes that most directly affected its sessions, the sanitation work of the Bhangis—all reflect the basic Gandian approach to the problem that dominated Congress from 1920 until Independence.

The first resolution on untouchability in the Gandhian Congress appeared in the last paragraph of the historic 1920 resolution stating: "In as much the movement of Non-Cooperation can only succeed by complete co-operation amongst the people themselves, this Congress calls upon public associations to advance Hindu-Muslim unity and the Hindu delegates of the Congress call upon the leading Hindus to settle all disputes between Brahmins and Non-Brahmins, wherever they may be existing and to a special effort to rid Hinduism of the reproach of untouchability and respectfully urges the religious heads to help the growing desire to reform Hinduism in the matter of its treatment of the suppressed classes".

The untouchable problem was now a 'reproach to Hinduism rather than hardship to 'untouchables'. The request of religious heads to help reform Hinduism is a Gandhian touch not found in earlier reform literature and it was to indicate that this appeal was valid as the resolution was supported at the Congress session by the Sankaracharya of Sarada Peeth who claimed his own Guru had taught that the uplift of the Depressed classes was in accordance with sastras.

The Congress Report of 1921 indicates two new tactics: - the elevation of the untouchable Bhangi caste sanitation work to respectability and the attempt to agree on a policy regarding their children's entry into nationalist schools.

The matter of untouchables and education brought up at the 1921 Congress was more complex than that of the sanitation work. In his welcome address as Chairman of the Reception Committee Vallabhabhai Patel said: "We have perhaps made the greatest advance in the matter of untouchability-as against boycott, national education, Khadi production and the picketing of liquor shops". At the same time he added: "The National Schools are open to them in theory for which the senate had to fight a tough battle. In practice however there is not yet the insistent canvass to bring the children of these countrymen to our schools and make them feel that they are in no way inferior to our own". He then noted that separate schools may have to be maintained for untouchable children for some time to come.

In 1922 the Working Committee had appointed very thoughtful and serious group of four to formulate schemes to better the condition of untouchables and allotted them five lakh rupees. In keeping with Gandhiji's religious head idea, Swami Shardhananda, was made Chairman, Sarojini Naidu and two important regional Congressmen, Indulal Yagnik of Gujrat and G.B Deshpande of the Karnatak were appointed as members. It came to nothing, the Swami resigned from the committee and later resigned from Congress in protest over the failure of Congress to heed his recommendations. After several vain attempts to help the Committee to function without Swami, in 1923 Working Committee asked the more orthodox and conservative Hindu Mahasabha to consider the matter.

The next Committee on untouchability was formed in 1929, with Pandit Malaviya of Hindu Mahasabha as President and millionaire Marwari businessmen Jammalal Bajaj as Secretary. Malaviya appeared to have done very little; Bajaj however, toured many parts of India. In 1928 he had opened his own temple in Wardha, the Lakshminarayan Temple to the untouchables, which all described as magnificent. Furthermore his tour was chiefly to persuade other temple owners and trustees to admit 'untouchables'. Temple entry was now an issue taken up by Congress in sub-committees and pursued over the next decade, always on a voluntary basis of persuasion. There were temple entry movements in the 1920s which probably influenced Congress's stress on this issue, with Vaikom and Parvati standing for early efforts of the Depressed classes them to claim religious rights.

The Vaikom Satyagraha was launched in Kerala in the spring of 1924 by members of the Ezhava caste, Syrian Orthodox Christians and some high-caste Hindus. The issue was the use of public roads on all four sides of the temple at Vaikom in Travancore. Gandhiji came to Travancore for a month in March 1925 and spent much time in fruitless discussion with temple priests on the problem of untouchables and their Karma, their status as the result of previous action. The satyagraha did not end until the fall of 1925 and the results were 'flimsy' according to Gandhiji, though use of some of the roads was finally allowed to them.

When the untouchables and others began a non-violent satyagraha at the holy hill of Parvati in Poona 1929, a Gandhian committee visited the site and talked to the trustees and found that the satyagraha had created an atmosphere of bitterness and distrust", Neither the Parvati satyagraha nor one begun at Nasik in 1930 met with the Congress approval. At an All India Suppressed Classes Conference held in Lahore in the Congress pavilion on 25 December 1929, Gandhiji made his position clear. He said: "Those temples where you are excluded from, because of your low birth have no Gods in them and those who enter them forcibly have no godliness within them". Although Gandhiji and Congress came to the position that all temple entry should be completely without coercion or demonstration the idea of temple entry for all had been firmly established as legitimate concern of Congress. The Anti-Untouchability Committee had been charged with a number of concerns, but temple entry became the overriding field of action for next decade. The issue that was at the core of the 1917 petition to Congress from the Depressed Classes Conference - admission to public office, public schools and public wells-seemed to have been largely bypassed by the Gandhian religious approach. There is an interesting note from the 1924 Belgaun Congress, in which Gandhiji was President, that the Hindu members of the Provincial Congress Committees were to ascertain the wants to the Depressed Classes in regard to wells, places of worship, facilities for education and so on and make provision for meeting such wants. This seemed almost in direct response to a resolution passed in 1923 by the Bombay Legislative Council allowing the 'untouchables' to use all public watering places, wells, schools, dispensaries and other facilities. The Bombay resolution had no teeth; in fact, District Collectors were to advise the local bodies to consider the recommendations. Both actions bore little fruit but that of the Bombay Legislative Council seemed much bolder.

In the Second Round Table Conference all minority communities of India claimed separate electorates. B.R. Ambedkar too claimed this for the depressed classes. Gandhiji as the sole representative of the Congress said in that Conference that "Untouchables were Hindus" and questioned "Would they remain Untouchables in perpetuity?", "Separate electorates for them will create a division in Hinduism, I cannot possibly tolerate what is in store for Hinduism if there are these two divisions setup in every village. Those who speak of political rights of Untouchables do not know India and do not know how Indian society is today constructed. Therefore, I want to say with all the emphasis that I can command that if I

was the only person to resist these things, I will resist it with my life.”

After his return from the Conference Gandhiji resumed the satyagraha again and was put in jail. From jail he wrote a letter to Samuel Hoare, Secretary of State for India, indicating that creation of separate electorates for the depressed classes was harmful. So far as Hinduism was concerned, separate electorates would simply vivisection and disrupt it. In case Government continued to stick to that decision Gandhiji reiterated, “I must fast unto death.” Prime Minister Macdonald’s Communal Award was announced on 17th August 1932. On 18th August 1932 Gandhiji wrote a letter to him proposing to begin his fast from the noon of 20th September. As there was no response from the Government, so he began his fast at that stipulated time and said in the press: “I believe that if untouchability is really rooted out, it will not only purge Hinduism of a terrible blot but its repercussions will be worldwide.” In his opinion Hindu Muslim conflict was politically disastrous but Hindu-Harijan division was politically disastrous and religious suicidal. The Indian leaders made every attempt to save the life of the Mahatma, finally they made the Poona Pact and Gandhiji broke his fast. Throughout India many temples were thrown open to the ‘untouchables’ 8th January was observed as “Temple Entry Day.” Hindus and Harijans began to fraternise in the towns. These events had their deep influence in Odisha.

According to Poona Pact separate electorates were given up for an increased share of reserved seats for Harijans. Gandhiji’s fast produced profound influence on the Hindus. It opened opportunities for beginning of Harijan Movement. It gave an impetus to inter-dining, eating or drinking from the hands of the Harijans, opening of wells and bathing ghats, roads and streets and schools and hostels to the Harijans. A wave of unprecedented enthusiasm swept all over the country. One of the greatest campaigns of social reformation was thus launched by Gandhiji.

Gandhiji’s decision to begin his fast on 20 September 1932 had its marked repercussions in Odisha. At Cuttack, people of all walks of life and even old men and children thought of allowing the ‘untouchables’ to enter the temples and use the wells. In this way, they presumed the life of the Mahatma might be saved. On 17th September prominent high caste Hindus met at the residence of Bichitrananda Das and formed a committee to hold regular meetings in order to educate public opinion for the removal of untouchability. Two mass meetings were held in the Cuttack Town Hall on two successive evenings where the people prayed for the life of Gandhiji and outlined the programmes of their future action. On 20 September, some devoted and sincere persons observed fast after a holy dip in the morning in the river Mahanadi. In the evening, they went to the temple of the deity Binodbihari for a darshan. Then, they led a procession, which also included few women to the Town Hall where they arranged a large meeting in which more than two thousand people joined amidst continuous rain. They prayed to God to save the life of Mahatma. Gandhiji did not plead only for the political privileges of the Harijans. He aimed at social and spiritual awakening of the caste Hindus to eradicate ‘untouchability’. Mere representation of the Harijans in the Legislatures would not solve the problem. Gandhiji wanted that all caste Hindus had a duty to remove it.

During the Mahatma’s fast, several Odias fasted for 24 hours every day at Cuttack. Their fasting was preceded by an associated with a Sankirtan party every day. These were followed by a procession consisting of caste Hindus and Harijans to the municipal ground where a mass prayer and a meeting were held in the evening. In each meeting the Harijan’s were requested to sit in the middle.

The Government had allowed Gandhiji to carry on the Harijan work from the jail with the hope that the attention of the nation would be diverted from the political agitation to social reforms. With his advice the All India Harijan Sevak Sangh was formed with Ghanshyam Das Birla as its President and A.V.Thakkar as its Secretary. Its objective was to promote the social, economic and educational wellbeing of the Harijans. A weekly, the Harijan was to be published.

By the beginning of November 1932 an Anti-Untouchability Committee consisting of 28 representatives from different districts was formed at Cuttack under the Chairmanship of Kabiraj Balunkeswar Acharya. The Committee formed the nucleus of the Orissa branch of the All India Harijan Sevak Sangha, formed under president ship of G.D.Birla. On 20 November 1932, A.V. Thakkar the General secretary of All India Harijan Sevak Sangha came to Cuttack and addressed a meeting held in the Cuttack Town Hall under the Presidentship of Gopabandhu Choudhury. In his address, Sri Thakkar stressed the necessity of spread of education among the 'untouchables' so as to make them conscious of their rights. He promised special aid and from the central fund of Harijan Sevak Sangha for that purpose in view of the poverty of Odisha. He deplored the negligence shown by the Cuttack Municipality towards the problems of the 'untouchable' inhabitants of the Rajabagicha area. According to the constitution of the All India Harijan Sevak Sangha the Utkal Board of the Sangha took up the following tasks:-

- Opening of the separate schools and hostels for the untouchables.
- Award of scholarships and stipends.
- Securing to them the right to enter the public Hindu temples.
- Digging separate wells.
- Providing access to the common wells.
- Providing employments.
- Sanitation in the Harijan Basties.

Under the inspiration of the Gandhian movement in January and February, 1933 a considerable number of untouchable students were admitted to the schools in Odisha division.

1. Primary school- 1197.
2. M.E. Schools-53.
3. High school- 47.

According to the report of Nandakishore Das the Secretary of Utkal Board of Harijan Sevak Sangha, the Sangha itself opened 26 schools (4 in Balasore district) 11 in Cuttack district, 3 in Puri district, 7 in Ganjam district and 1 in Sambalpur district for the depressed classes.

Among a number of hostels opened for the Harijans the most noted was Kaiblya Kutir of Cuttack. It was maintained by the Utkal Board of the Harijan Sevak Sangha and had 10 Harijan students, reading in the high schools as its inmates by March 1934.

So far the entry of the 'untouchables' into the temples was concerned, the task was rendered difficult by the reaction which started very soon after the commencement of the Harijan Movement. In a meeting, held in Cuttack town Hall on 18 December 1932 under the auspices of the Harijan Sevak Sangha which was attended by Gopabandhu Choudhury, Satyanarayan Sengupta, Radhanath Rath, Rajkrushna Bose and Dr. Atal Bihari Acharya, the conservative leader, Pancha Jyotribit Kavyatirtha Shastri Sarawati Parikhit Dash Sharma, the Secretary of Utkal Sanatan Dharma Sabha pronounced the verdict on the Harijan Movement in the face of thunderous opposition from the audience. "By removal of 'untouchability' and entry of 'untouchables' into the temples you are going to destroy the Sanatana religion." In a meeting of the conservatives held under the auspices of the Utkal Sanatana Dharma Sabha on 23 December 1932 in the premise of the Gopalji Temple, Cuttack, the anti untouchability leader, Radhanath Rath and his followers had a verbal tussle with the conservatives. In that meeting the young Congress workers laughed at the conservatives and obstructed the proceeding of that meeting. Of all the temples the question of entry into the Jagannath Temple assumed special importance in view of the antiquity and eminence of the temple. But on this question strong opposition was encountered from the conservatives. On 8th January 1933 at 5.30pm the Sanatan Dharma Rakshini Sabha was to hold a meeting in front of the Singhadwar (Lions Gate) of the Jagannath Temple to oppose the move for the untouchable's entry into it. The anti-untouchability workers also planned to hold a meeting there at the same time. Consequently a tussle between the two antagonistic groups seemed inevitable. But this untoward situation was avoided by clamping of section 144 of I.P.C. by the police. A committee was formed at Puri with Nilakantha Das as the President and Lokanath Mishra as the Secretary to carry on the temple-entry movement in the town. Discussions were started with the Raja of Puri and the Mahanta of Emar Math for abolishing the disability of the 'untouchables' in this matter. Jivaram Kalyanji also began working among the intelligentsia and the priestly class at Puri to create an atmosphere in favour of the abolition of the practice of untouchability in that holy city and to make the famous temple accessible to the 'untouchables'. Efforts were made to reform Mukti Mandap of the Jagannath Temple so as to bring into it real scholars, who might give a favorable verdict in favour of 'untouchables' entry into the temple. The local Harijan workers and leaders, Nilakantha Das, Loknath Mishra and Raghunath Mishra advocated that the doors of Sri Jagannath temple were open to all castes in the past. They should be opened now for the untouchables. They urged the people to support them whole-heartedly. However this move lacked warm support of the people. But the Raja of Puri and some Mahantas strongly opposed the entry of untouchables into the temple. While the Jagannath Temple officially

remained closed to the untouchables, by March 1934 three temples had been declared open for the untouchables such as Raghunathji Temple at Berhampur, Khirochora Gopinath temple at Remuna and the Siva Temple at Kujang in Cuttack district. Caste Hindus also employed Harijans as their domestic servants in many places of the Balasore district. They also accepted food and water from their hands.

Throughout Odisha thousands followed their examples. Many dined publicly with the Harijans. The movement did not remain confined to the urban areas alone. It also spread to the remote corners of villages. Public dinners were arranged in the villages. Harijans were encouraged to sit and eat with the caste Hindus in the same rows. Wells and bathing ghats were opened for them. The municipal well at Guriapur in the Jajpur town was allowed to be used by the untouchables.

At Cuttack Smt. Rama Devi started to take regular classes of some Harijan girls mostly from the scavenger families in the town. Under the auspices of the Anti-Untouchability Board, seven other sisters, named Mangala Sengupta, Godabari Das, Sobha Panda, Annarpurna Choudhury, Tulasi Mohanty, Manik Devi and Sushila Devi worked with her for the promotion of social wellbeing of the Harijans. They taught devotional songs to the untouchable girls in Rajabagicha, Mathasahi, Jhanjirimangala and Kaflabazaar. They also attempted to extend their activities to other bazaars in the Cuttack town.

They moved from place to place and advised the Harijans to refrain from eating beef or carrion, distributed medicines among them and explained them to follow simple rules of hygiene and health so that they would be able to keep themselves and their houses clean. Smt. Haimavati Devi opened a day school for Harijans in the village Patnaik Sahi near Sakhigopal in the Puri district. She worked there without remuneration. Admiring the Harijan welfare work in Odisha under Smt. Rama Devi and her associates Gandhiji wrote: "I congratulate these sisters of Cuttack on their devotion to the cause of the much desired reform." He hoped that women on other parts of India should follow the footsteps of the Odia women. Making an appeal to the Harijan workers in India particularly the women workers he wrote:

"In this struggle for religious reform the women of India may be expected to take a leading part, I hope therefore that the example of the women of Cuttack will prove infectious and that the work began by Smt. Rama Devi and her companions will be continued in spite of difficulties and disappointments that they might have to face." Thus widespread awareness was created throughout Odisha against untouchability and initial steps for its removal had begun in right earnest. The field was thus made ready for Gandhiji's tour.

A. Gandhiji in Odisha for Harijan Welfare:

On 7th November 1933, Gandhiji began his ten month tour for Harijan welfare and visited every province of India. The purpose of his tour was to educate public opinion for the eradication of untouchability and collect funds for the well being of the Harijans.

Gandhiji's tour in Odisha began in May 1934. In the original programme eight or nine days were allotted to Odisha. So Harijan Sevak Sangha of Orissa had decided to exclude Sambalpur and Anugul from Gandhiji's tour programme. Nrusingha Guru, in-charge of Sambalpur district, Harijan Sevak Sangha. championed the claims of Sambalpur and Angul before Amritlal Thakkar, Secretary. All India Harijan Sevak Sangha. Sri Thakkar visited Sambalpur in 1933 in connection with Harijan work and was highly satisfied with the developments in the entire district in this matter. So he decided that Mahatma's Harijan tour would begin from Sambalpur.

Accordingly Gandhiji landed at Jharsuguda railway station on 5 May 1934, Pandit Nilakantha Das, Rajkrushna Bose and Laxmi Narayan Mishra had escorted his party from Jamshedpur. At Jharsuguda he was received by a group of Harijan workers and Gujurati

businessmen. He addressed a public meeting and left for Sambalpur. He visited the quarters of the Gandas and Ghasis (sweepers) and advised them to live in a manner worthy at par with caste Hindus. He also visited the leper asylum. The Chairman of the Sambalpur Municipality apprised him about the education, housing and water supply to the Harijans. Gandhiji requested him to adopt some steps to improve the lots of the untouchables. The major problem of the Harijans was the dearth of clean water. Gandhiji's visit to Sambalpur produced considerable impact on Harijans. He awakened them from their moral lethargy and brought unity and strength to their community. He addressed a large public meeting at Sambalpur which was attended by 4000 people including some women. Rupees of 356/- was presented to him. In honor of the visit of Gandhiji, Janardan Pujari donated a house for the Harijan boys in the town. In Sambalpur district there was no Government interference in the activities of Gandhiji. But the Government officers at Angul had prohibited the public to extend any accommodation to Gandhiji or hold any public meeting. So he had to endure the full heat of the noon in the outskirts of the town under a hastily rigged up tattered tent and in full view of persistent multitude. Government report said : "The immediately after his arrival, Gandhiji addressed a public meeting of 10,000 people including 3000 to 4000 of the Depressed classes (Haris, Panas, Domas) mostly from Angul and some from neighbouring states of Talcher, Hindol, Athamalik and Dhenkanal." Once the crowd became un-managable, Gandhiji had to climb to the top of a car and pacify the crowd with a few words. The crowd at Angul surrounded him and presented him copper mites amounting of Rs. 125.00. He had addressed the crowd three times. Hundred Brahmins quoted scriptures against him. He and his party left Angul and preceded to Meramundali railway station to catch the evening train to Puri. On the way he stopped at Banarpal, there he addressed about 2500 people and collected Rs.25/-. As per the report of Deputy Commissioner of Angul, most of the people could not hear his words due to loud singing of songs. Mainly the people came to satisfy their curiosity to see Gandhiji.

Gandhiji and his party reached Puri on 6th May 1934 in the night by train. He was greeted by a huge crowd in the railway station. Pandit Nilakantha Das was in charge of his reception. The local Congressmen anticipating trouble from the sanatanis requested the District Magistrate and the Superintendent of Police to provide police force for Gandhiji's protection. Gandhiji was not happy with this arrangement. He was not at all anxious to be saved from sanatanis rather he decided to undertake the tour on foot only. That was why he insisted on his pilgrimage on foot from Puri. Having read the mind of the Mahatma, Amritlal Thakkar informed the workers of Odisha that Gandhiji would finish the rest of his tour on foot. A sudden change in this programme astonished every one, because in that case Gandhiji would not be able to cover all the districts. People might be eagerly yearning to see him. They would certainly be disappointed to learn the changed programme. All these thoughts perturbed the mind of the workers. Hearing all these objections Gandhiji said: "A tour on foot will be much more impressive and effective than an extensive tour by car or train, because the Harijan Movement is religious by nature. All great religions owe their existence to the foot-marches undertaken by great spiritual leaders. Puri is a place of pilgrimage and a centre of religion. So the change-over to the really religious method of preaching ought to be undertaken here."

In the midst of workers he concluded: "I no longer want to travel by train or car. If you will insist, I will allow you to take me by train or car. But in that case it will be like carrying my soul-less body." Then all arrangements of his tour were made under his direct supervision. He also decided the composition of the party and things to be carried. So on 8th May he suddenly changed his programme and decided to finish on that day all his functions

for 9th May. In the press conference he explained, "If I propagate my views even in one corner of the country it will have its impact throughout India." Once more he emphasized that, "if my message comes from heart, it will travel faster than by rail or motor".

B. Padyayatra for Harijan.

On 8th May 1934 Gandhiji unveiled a statue of Pandit Gopabandhu Das near the Lion's Gate of the temple of Lord Jagannath. Addressing the people he said his walking tour would commence from Puri where all Hindus receive the Mahaprasad on a footing of perfect equality. The walking tour emphasized the spiritual nature of the Harijan Movement. The canker of untouchability had taken such a deep root that all renunciation was necessary for its removal. After the public meeting he addressed a women's meeting. Here, he announced that he would start for the villages on Puri-Cuttack road on the next day. People were welcomed to join him in this pilgrimage, but they must not try to touch his feet nor crowd him. They must walk neither behind the pilgrims never ahead nor abreast of them and obey their instructions. They must not make noise, but March in peace and they must make their own arrangements for food and shelter. They should not be a burden on the villagers. 9th May 1934 is a memorable day in the annals of Odisha history. Gandhiji began his padayatra from Puri on that day with Gopabandhu Choudhury, Rama Devi, Rajkrushna Bose and few other leaders. Pandit Nailkantha Das, Pandit Lingaraj Mishra, Ananta Mishra, Jagannath Rath, Satyabadi Nanda, Lal Bihari Das had planned the tour programme of Gandhiji in Puri district. Besides this, Gandhiji's immediate entourage consisted of Smt. Mira Behn, Smt. Uma Bajaj, Smt. Sushila Behn, Smt. Pravabati Devi, Amritlal Thakkar, Balaji Govindji Desai, Damodar Das and Kaka Kalekar. Two Sub-Inspectors of police were always with the pilgrims to watch their movements.

The news of padayatra spread soon to the remote corner of the nearby villages. It generated unbelievable enthusiasm among the people. Addressing the villagers at Bira-Harekrushnapur, Gandhiji said that the walk to their village had given him great pleasure. He was following the ancient tradition only. The peaceful atmosphere of a pilgrimage on foot was totally different from the din and bustle of motor cars and trains. But if it were to bear fruits, he emphasized he must have their fullest co-operation. They must abolish the system of having one quarter for the Brahmins another for the Harijans and so forth. They must accord to the Harijans all the rights and privileges enjoyed by the rest of the Hindus. At last he appealed to all to give up their indolence card, gin and spin and take to wearing during their leisure hours. This he repeated in most of his meetings. Meantime, Satyanarayan Sengupta, Bichitrananda Das, Binod Kanungo, Surendra Nath Patnaik, Sahadev Das, Gajendra Nath Das, Nanda Kishore Das, Karunakar Panigrahi, Hare Krushna Mahatab and other workers of Cuttack and Balasore districts joined the padayatra. Gandhiji assured them that in order to complete his tour in Odisha he might cancel his programme in Bengal.

Under the leadership of Gandhiji the pedestrians used to get up early in morning. After prayer and breakfast, they walked to the destination where a public meeting was held immediately after his arrival.

At some places Gandhiji visited the Harijan Bastis. If the houses of the untouchables were at a distance, he sent some workers on village sanitation work. This was followed by lunch and rest. In the afternoon, Gandhiji held discussions with the local workers. After dinner in early evening the party started for the next camp where the members held their night halt. Generally the evening meeting were largely attended. After each meeting, Gandhiji collected contributions towards Harijan Fund. This was the general routine followed throughout his padayatra.

Thousands of people attended his meetings. From miles around hundreds of people gathered by the roadside to see the march of the pilgrims. Men, women and children of all ages of one village walked with them to the next village or as long as their feet carried them. Some times, Gandhiji invited them to join his holy march. At Kadua there was a Khadi centre and a Haijan boarding, Gandhiji stayed there. At Birapurussottampur, the Brahmins were in favour of the removal of untouchability. They presented him an address of welcome and a purse. His speeches in Hindi were translated into Odia by Rajkrushna Bose. Many socio-political workers came to Odisha to observe the foot-march. The foremost among them was Satish Chandra Dasgupta who was in charge of Haijan work in Bengal. He met Gandhiji at Danda-Mukundapur and easily agreed to the proposal of extension of foot March upto Balasore. The meeting on the bed of River Daya had best audience. Hundreds of persons from Bhubaneswar attended it. At Satyabhamapur, the Harijans were invited by the pilgrims to dine with them. After consulting the elders they satdown to enjoy “perhaps the first good meal they had ever eaten in their lives.

On 15th may Gandhiji performed the ceremony of opening of the Nikunja Bihari temple at Balianta to all including the Harijans, which displayed considerable enthusiasm. He emphasized that the temple of his dream was a centre of all welfare activities of the villagers including house the village school, village library and the dispensary and its priest should handle all these responsibilities.

The mass meeting which was addressed by Gandhiji on the bed of River Kathajori attended by near about twelve thousand people. He advised them to give up caste prejudices, abolish purdah, give up intoxicants, use the homespun Khadi and throw open temples, wells and schools to the Harijans.

He left Odisha on 16th May in order to attend the meeting of A.I.C.C. at Patna. Before this, he assured the people, that he would resume his foot march from the last week of May. He suggested that the workers of other provinces should arrange simultaneous walking tours in their provinces, so that it will led to intimate touch between the Congress Workers and the Harijans.

C. **Orissa Removal of Civil Disabilities Bill (1946).**

H. K. Mahatab introduced the Orissa Removal of Civil Disabilities Bill on 30 September 1946 in the second session of the Assembly. Its main purpose was to remove certain disability from which a certain section of the Hindu community suffered at that time. The members of the House wholeheartedly supported the Bill. The most important clause of the Bill for removal of the civil disabilities was as follows: “Notwithstanding any law, custom, usage or prescription to the contrary no Hindu shall, by reason merely of his belonging to any particular community or class known as Harijans, untouchables, Depressed class or the like be prevented or disabled from being appointed to any public office or enjoying or having access to any public-stream, river, well, tank, pathway, sanitary convenience, or means of transport or any secular institution which the general public belonging to all other classes and communities of Hindus have a right to enjoy or have access to...” The Bill also provided penalty for those prevented or obstructed a Harijan in the exercise of his rights under the Act. The penalty to be imposed was fine to the extent of fifty ruppes. The Bill was passed on 30 September 1946 and came into force from 2 October 1946 after receiving the Governor’s assent.

D. Orissa Temple Entry Authorisation and Indemnity Bill, 1947.

In order to remove the inequalities of the Harijans, the Orissa Temple Entry Authorisation and Indemnity Bill 1947 was introduced in the House on 14 February 1947. While it was primarily objected to by the Opposition leader Sailendra Narayan Bhanja Deo and Deputy Leader Lokanath Mishra but at last both of them withdrew their objections and the Bill was passed on 14 February 1947. It received the assent of the Governor General on 9 April 1947. So in this way the Congress Ministry adopted two important legislative measures for uplifting the condition of the Harijans, specially their social status. The Orissa Debt Bondage Abolition Regulations, 1948 came in to force vide law department Notification on 17 June 1948 to abolish the system of debt bondage.

The Gothi (Bonded Labour) was abolished and actions were taken to abolish Bethi and Begari. The Orissa Moneylenders Bill, 1947 was adopted by the Orissa Legislative Assembly on 10 March 1947. It was another milestone to check slavery.

To provide employment opportunities for the candidates belonging to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes the Government took up careful steps to provide them representation in the state public service. As regards to public health besides general steps, efforts were made to identify the diseases peculiar to the ethnic groups. At that time a major disease called 'Yaws' was prevalent among the Koyas of Koraput. In 1948-49 a sum of Rs.10, 000 was paid for the purpose. Rupees 15,000 was spent for the treatment of venereal diseases in each of the Agency areas of Ganjam and Koraput. Anti-malaria tablets were distributed among the backward tribes of Mayurbhanj in 1948.

E. Department of SC & ST.

The major portion of the population of Odisha was suffering from poverty and backwardness. The Congress Ministry had to undertake a number of social and educational reform programmes following the ideals of Mahatma Gandhi. The main socio-educational reforms were concerned with the removal of untouchability, prohibition schemes and programmes of Basic education. The first Congress Ministry had initiated certain measures in this regard. So it was upto the Second Ministry to follow their footsteps.

The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes of Odisha constituted one of the poorest sections of total population. At that time the total population of Odisha province and Odisha states was about 13.7 million. Out of that Scheduled Caste numbered about 18.6 lakhs and Scheduled Tribe were about 35 lakhs. The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes were economically exploited by various practices, such as Bethi, Begari, Goti and rural indebtedness. Severe social maladies like addiction to country liquor and opium were in full swing. Due to economic miseries in certain tribes there developed crime mentality and such groups were categorised as 'Criminal Tribes'. They were very often subjected to police harassment. So in all the Scheduled Tribe population was socially secluded, economically depressed and was living in the midst of ignorance, poverty and bondage, the Scheduled Caste population was maintaining its existence with utter social inferiority, educational backwardness and economic bondage. Some social vices such as untouchability and refusal of entry to place of worship were prevalent. The Second Congress Ministry made several efforts to bring this section to the main stream by implementing various programmes and policies. In 1938 Government of Odisha setup a committee under A.V. Thakkar known as "Partially Excluded Area Enquiry Committee" which recommended in 1940 for creation of a special Department called Backward Class Welfare Department. The Government of Odisha created the Department on 4th November 1946 and Premier took the charge of the newly created Department. The main work of the Department was to chalk out plans for bringing the backward classes at par with the advanced section of the society. Further all welfare schemes under various Departments brought under this newly created Department and it was renamed

as “Rural Welfare Department” Some legal enactment was necessary for the removal of civil disabilities of the Harijans. In this aspect two important acts were passed by the Congress Ministry during this period.

Discussion.

1. **Promotion of caste free society to meet the economic sustainability for a large populated country like India.**
2. **To avoid hunger, Starvation and above all round development all in general and down trodden people in particular.**
3. **It was a sign of a union of hearts among the Indians of compassion towards the poor. Irrespective of any caste, colour, creed, poor, rich, and above all community including Hindu and Muslims to symbolise communal harmony unite a greater India.**
4. **To propagate Gandhiji’s philosophy among the masses in the villages and it practically brought the caste Hindus and dalits closer, despite stray cases of protest from a few Sanatanis.**

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